

WORDS BY JESS FOGARTY. PICTURES BY JESS FOGARTY + ALEXANDRA DUNSFORD-WHITE.

LICENSED TO TOW?

HOW TO GET AN EB LICENCE SO THAT YOU CAN TOW A BIG TRAILER OR CARAVAN – LEGALLY.

If you were born after 1981, have a South African driver's licence, and are towing a large trailer or caravan, there's a pretty good chance that you're breaking the law. Why? Because your standard-issue B licence doesn't allow you to tow anything with a GVM (gross vehicle mass) greater than 750 kilograms – which pretty much rules out most caravans and big off-road trailers.

In 2000, when SA changed over to the card licence system (the earlier licence had been printed or stuck on a page in your ID book), all Code 08 driver's licences were

automatically converted to the new EB licences. The Code 8 and the EB licence allow you to drive a rig with a gross combination mass (the combined tare weights of tow vehicle and caravan/trailer) not exceeding 3 500 kg. Bottom line: if you want to tow big loads, you've got to get yourself an EB. In this article we aim to show you how!

CAN'T I GET BY WITH MY B LICENCE?

If you get stopped at a roadblock and the traffic official can see that you're clearly towing a big load, he's going to expect you to produce an EB licence. And when you don't, well... that's



when your problems begin. You'll be asked to check in at the nearest weighbridge. They'll check the trailer/caravan's GVM and you'll be fined about R150 for every 150 kg that you're over the 750 kg allowed for a B licence.

And then you'll be told to empty your trailer/caravan until the weight is under 750 kg. If you can't get the weight down, your holiday will end right there. You won't be allowed to proceed with your caravan/trailer in tow.

Another way the illegal route will bite you is on the insurance side. If you're in an accident and your insurance company discovers that

you don't have the right licence, they have every right to refuse your claim (and they will) which will leave you responsible for the entire cost of repairs / replacement / repatriation, etc.

TOWING LESSONS

Now, it may be that you have only a B licence, but you've been towing since you were knee-high to a grasshopper, so you reckon, 'No problem, I'll just go write my EB licence'. Trust me; you need to go for towing lessons. Remember, with the new system, it's not about your driving skills, reaction time or style of driving. It's all about driving the

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way that they want you to drive. This is why driving instructors often find it very difficult to teach someone who has been driving for a few years – they've already developed their own driving habits and style. It seems that riding the clutch is one of my bad habits. So don't be macho or proud, go for lessons. You need the practise.

THE LEARNER'S TEST

Feeling like I was 18 again, I had to rewrite the learner's licence test. Yip, to get an EB if you've got a B means that you have to start at the very beginning. Writing the learner's proved relatively easy, most of the questions are common driving knowledge. Not much departure from the B licence here, except that there were more questions on maximum bridge height, weight restrictions and the like.

In order to book your learner's licence test, you'll have to produce a valid form of identification, R68 for a booking fee and two ID photos. You can book and complete the test at any traffic department in the country, all you need is the blue (LLI) Learner's Application Form. And on this is where you choose to do either your Code 2 or Code 3 learner's test.

Code 2 applies to light motor vehicles, which includes all vehicles (except motorcycles) with a tare weight of 3 500 kilograms or less. This includes minibuses, buses, goods vehicles and articulated vehicles. The Code

3 licence applies to heavy motor vehicles, trucks and the like, but includes all vehicles except motorcycles. When applying, you will also be asked to complete an eye test. So take your specs.

Once you've passed your test, you pay R33 to be issued your learner's permit, after which you can immediately make an appointment for your driver's test – which I suggest you do there and then. In the major centres you can wait months for a slot to become available.

BOOKING THE DRIVER'S TEST

To book your driver's test, you need to complete the green Application For Driving Licence form, provide one ID photo, and pay R135. They will then require you to do ANOTHER eye test, just to make sure you haven't gone blind in the interim. Once they give you a date, that's it. Postponements need to be arranged at least three days prior to your test, but you may then have to wait another few months for the next slot to open up.

TIP: If you're the impatient type, you can phone the traffic department as often as you like to enquire about cancellations. These aren't too rare – so do this only if you're ready for your test there and then, as a cancellation can mean doing your test within a few days!

DRIVER'S TEST STRUCTURE

Like the B licence that most of us youngsters got when we turned 18, the EB licence test consists of a yard test and a road test. Each takes 20 minutes. And, bear in mind that your EB licence test can be done only at certain traffic departments, as many have smaller yards that can't accommodate a vehicle and trailer. You need to find a yard that does code 10 (truck) licences.

THE YARD TEST

The yard test consists of all the technical moves, these include pre-trip inspections, alley docking from the right, straight reversing, parallel parking, a left turn, and a hill start. This is less that you need to do for your B licence, which also includes alley docking from both sides and a 3-point turn. You have 20 minutes to complete these manoeuvres, and you lose points for every extra minute required. You're allowed to lose a total of 50 points in the yard – any more and you fail. Remember that the trailer / caravan

that you use for your test MUST weigh 750 kg or more.

The examiner will join you and ask you for the interior, exterior and start-up inspections. This is the same as for your B licence – checking tyre pressures, tread, and for obstructions, etc. etc. – except that you now include the trailer's / caravan's tyres and tail lights, etc.

TIP: Know where your licence disc is – on both the vehicle and the trailer / caravan – in case the examiner asks; and, furthermore, make sure neither has expired!

After this, you will be instructed to perform the first manoeuvre. Bear in mind that the examiner's stopwatch will be paused while they are giving you instructions, which means that your 20 allocated minutes consists only of the time when you are actually attempting the manoeuvre.

There are thousands of checks throughout the test that can easily catch you out – as no person in their right mind would actually do all of them while driving! If you already have a licence, you will remember the countless check check check story from before. Sadly, this is still part of the test, and – even if you've done your B licence – you have to do it all again! You lose points on your test by not checking your blind-spot enough, or your mirrors – before you turn, while you turn, before you stop, before you indicate, before you breathe.

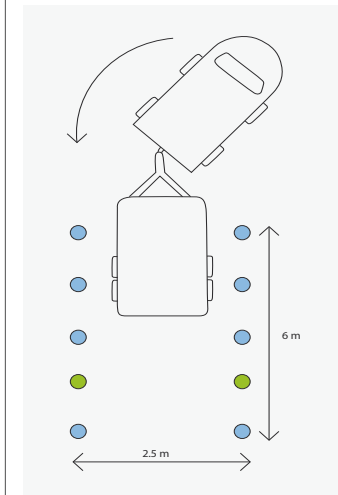
The left turn is pretty straightforward: don't drive over the white line, don't mount the pavement, and remember all your checks. The straight reversing seems pretty simple, but there are a few things that you could get wrong. It is a straight reverse for 40 metres between two white lines that are four metres apart. You're not allowed to coast with your clutch in – that's an immediate fail – nor can you cross the white lines, or stop before the designated yellow line, or stop too far past it. The problem here is that to avoid clutch-coasting, you tend to pick up speed; but, go too fast, and you can easily jack-knife your trailer / caravan.

Next is the alley docking, which is slightly more complicated. This is when you reverse on a level road with a curve into an alley. In your EB test, you have to do this only from the right – unlike in your B, when you do it from both sides. There isn't a set method for getting into the bay; you just have to steer and correct, steer and correct.

You are then required to park and unhitch the trailer / caravan and move on to the parallel parking. Easy enough, unless you're driving a limousine-like double cab which makes life a bit tricky. Remember that the bay is only 7 x 2.5 metres, and you have to do this from both sides.

After completing this, you hitch up and head for your hill start. Also easy enough – but remember that some yards have steeper hill angles than others, so choose wisely. Here we all know the basics: stop behind the white line, and DO NOT ROLL BACK!

If you have completed all of this successfully, then it's off to the road test.



THE ROAD TEST

The checks for the road test are the same as for the yard test, but be prepared – they come fast! There's no particular difference between the road test for an EB licence and a B licence; this half of the test is also 20 minutes long, and each minute on the road is worth eight points. You fail if you lose over 160 points.

Then the examiner adds up your marks and gives you the news. If you have passed, you can march straight off to the traffic department with your examiner, who gives you all the appropriate paper work. You then have your photo taken, your prints lifted, and

FIND THE RIGHT TEST CENTRE

Not all driving-licence testing centres offer EB licences (as I mentioned before), so make sure that you find out which does. The preferred yards are:

CAPE TOWN

Milnerton:
William Penn Drive
021 550 1312 / 05
Ottery:
C/O New Ottery and Old
Strandfontein Road
021 710 8308 / 068
Gallows Hill Testing Centre:
C/o Ebenezer & Somerset
Road, Green Point
021 406 8742
Parow:
C/o Jan Smuts & Beacon
Road, Parow Valley
021 936 8730 / 1

DURBAN

Pinetown:
1 Stockbill Road
031 700 1528 / 0
Rosburgh:
36 Titren Road
031 465 1684

JOBURG

Randburg:
C/o Hans Strydom and Hans
Schoeman Street, Malanshof
011 793 3792
**Marlboro License Test
Centre:**
C/o 8th and 9th Street,
Marlboro Gardens, Marlboro,
Sandton
011 321 6372 / 57

you sign a few things; then, after handing over R140 and two ID photos, you're given your temporary licence. Your card will take six to eight weeks to arrive, and must be collected from the same traffic department.

TEACH YOUR CHILDREN WELL

TIP: If you have children who haven't yet applied to do their driver's licence, and there's a high possibility that they'll need to tow caravans, boats or horseboxes one day, get them to do the EB towing licence the first time round. It's much easier than re-doing it later, saves a lot of time, stress and money, and the EB licence includes all of the normal B standards, anyway. And, just between you and me, the EB test might in fact be easier than the B licence test in that there's no alley docking from the left or 3-point turns, and the road test is virtually the same.

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LEARN FROM MY MISTAKES

So, it took me two attempts to pass my EB licence. The first time around, I did almost everything wrong. Firstly I borrowed my dad's Hilux, but the fitted aluminium canopy severely restricted my rearward view; I couldn't even see the trailer, much less the poles. The Hilux's bull bar didn't help much either, taking away a further foot of space in the front!

The first instructor (from a large, national driving school) had me doing alley docking from the left – not part of the test. And, after I'd spoken to the traffic department official the next morning, I realised that the instructor had been teaching me more incorrect material.

I had one short hour with another instructor, but it was never going to be enough. Add to that the fact that I only laid eyes on the trailer I was to use when I arrived

at the test yard. No, doing the test with a huge, long trailer I'd never towed before was an exercise in futility. I didn't even make it out the yard for the road test.

The second time around, it was smooth sailing the whole way. Four two-hour lessons put me back on track. This time, driving a Pathfinder, I could see out the back perfectly, and although quite a long SUV, she parallel-parked like a dream and towed like a star. The beautiful Nissan has a distinctive clutch take-up, but it's easily mastered. Stalling won't make you fail, but it could make you roll back!

CHECK YOUR INSTRUCTOR

There are lots of skelm instructors out there, so make sure they know what they're talking about. You have every right to ask to see their certificate; the AA recommends finding an instructor who is SAIDI (Southern African Institute of Driving Instructors) certified. Check on www.saidi.co.za. If you're not sure about your instructor, ask him to show you how the manoeuvre is done. That'll show you whether he can walk the talk. ■

